

StoryWeaver

How Old is Muttajji?

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Level 4



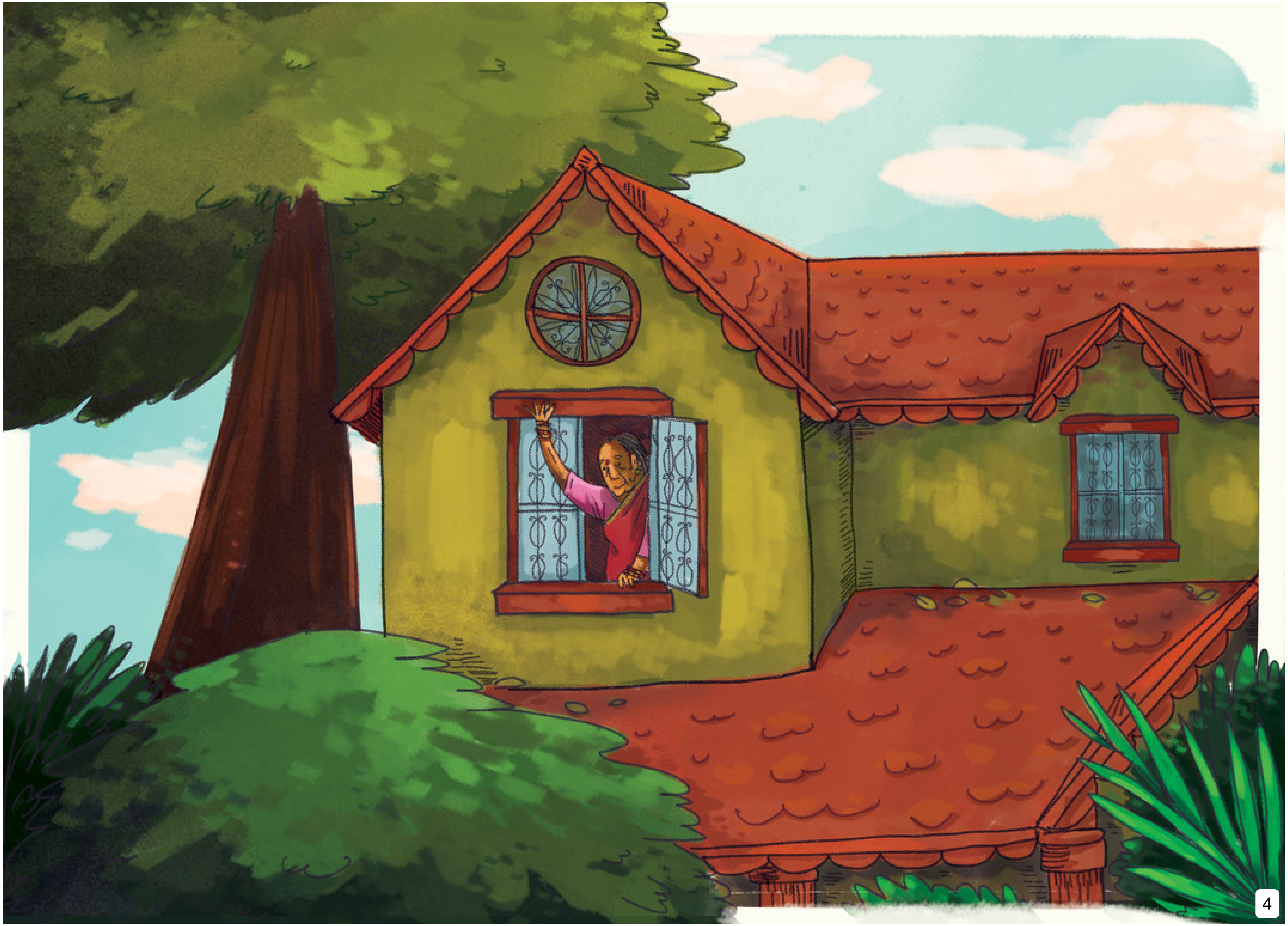
Putta and Putti jumped out of bed.

It was Muttajji's birthday and they had a train to catch!

Muttajji, who was the twins' mother's mother's mother, lived in Mysore with Ajji, who was the twins' mother's mother. No one actually knew when Muttajji's birthday was; but Ajji had always celebrated it on the Makara Sankranthi holiday.
"Amma, will there be a cake?" asked Putti. "A big, spongy cake with pink icing and a rose on top?"

"Naah," said Putta. "Old people don't have birthday cakes. And 200 candles won't fit on any cake."
"Muttajji isn't 200 years old, silly," said Putti. "How old is Muttajji, Amma?"
Amma smiled. "Why don't you ask her when we get there?"







The moment they reached the old green house in Mysore, the twins burst into Muttajji's room.

"Happy birthday, Muttajji! How old are you today?"

Muttajji hugged the twins. "How old am I? Who knows? How does it matter?"

"But it does!" cried Putta and Putti together.

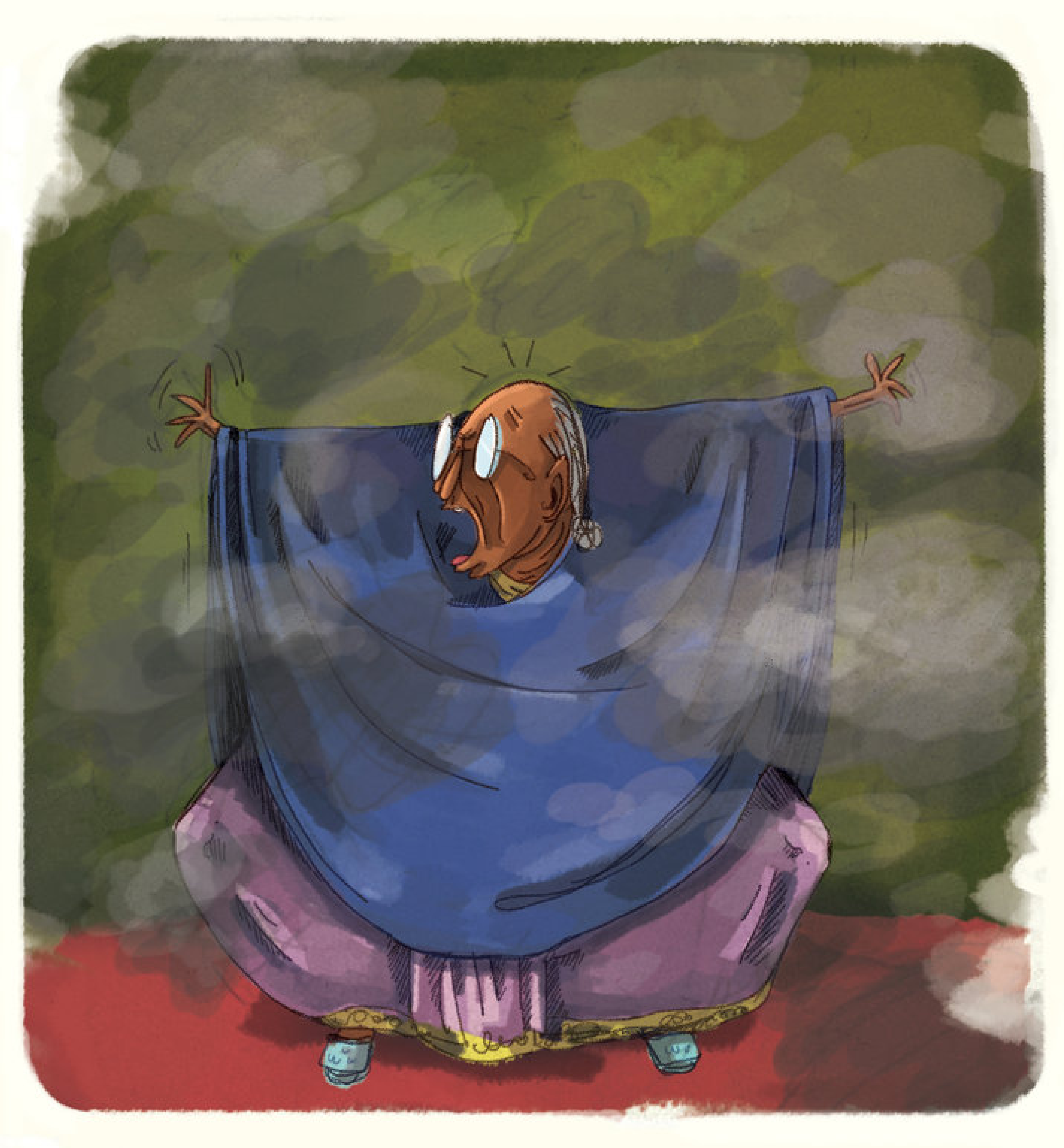


Muttajji smiled. "Well," she said, "I know that around five years before I was born, our Maharaja went to a grand party for Indian Maharajas and Maharanis in Delhi. A British king and queen had come to visit, and our Maharaja got a gold medal."

"Oooh! A party! There must have been lots of cake!" said Putti. "Who was this king, Muttajji? If you know, we can find out which year he visited. if we add five years to that, we will know when YOU were born!"

Muttajji shrugged. "I've forgotten, Putta."

Putta's face fell.



"Wait," said Muttajji. "Let me see if I can remember something else. Aaaan! When I was about your age - nine or ten - my uncle from Bombay visited us and told us about clean trains."

"Clean trains?"

"Yes!" Muttajji was excited. "They had started running in Bombay that year. You never got dirty travelling in them. No black dust on your clothes and face, no grime, nothing!"

The twins stared at her. Why would anyone get dirty travelling by train?



"Some years later," continued Muttajji, "I got married. The law was that a girl should be at least 15 before she was married, and my father would never break the law, so I must have been 16 then. Very soon after my marriage, your Muttajja got a job in Bombay, and we left Mysore."

"Did anything important happen the year you got married, Muttajji?" asked Putta.

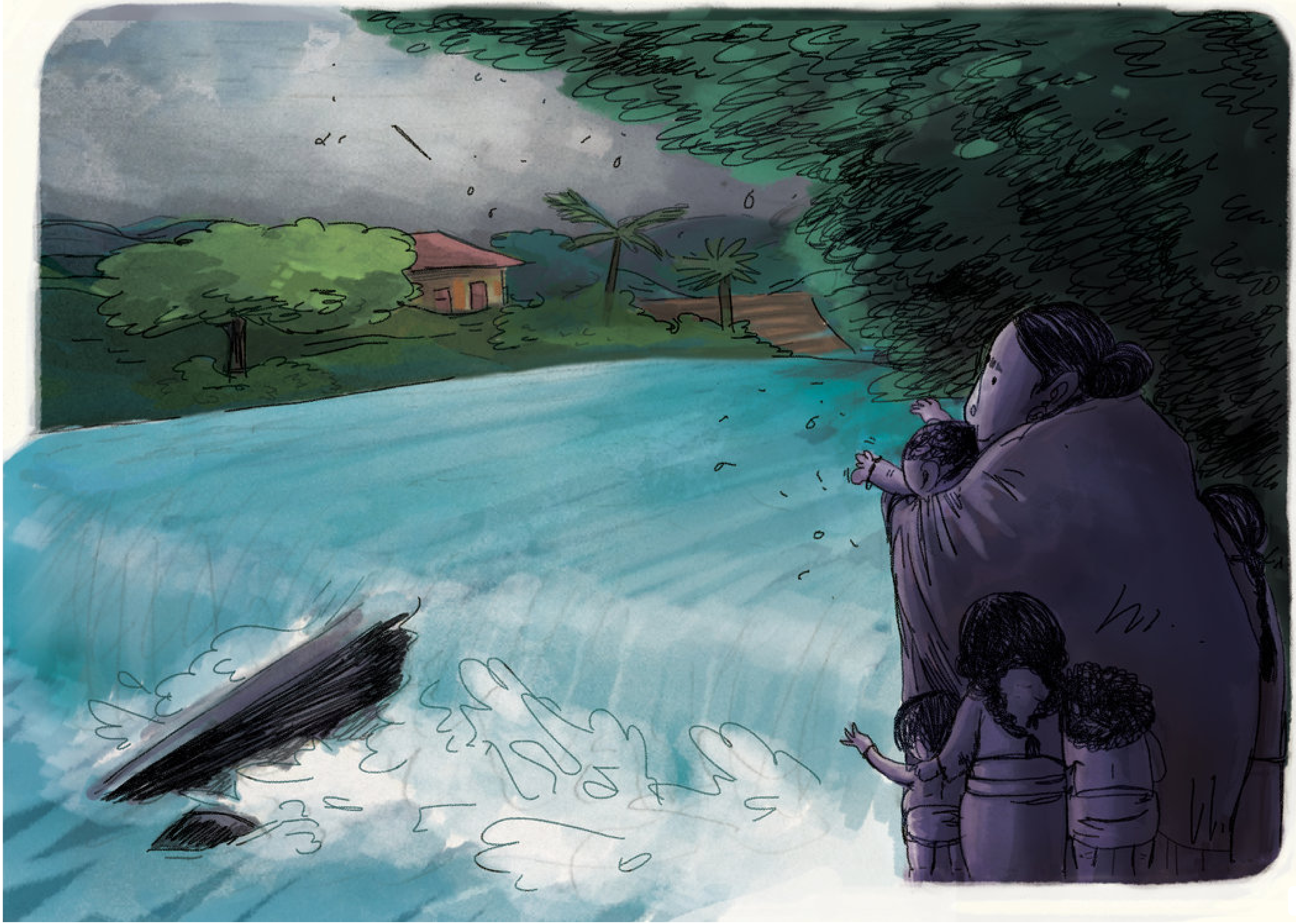
"Yes," said Muttajji sadly. "Our Maharaja inaugurated our big dam, and the beautiful gardens next to it, during the Dasara festival that year. But I missed it; I was in Bombay. "

"A big dam?" Putta sat up. "Is it still there?"

Muttajji hooted with laughter. "Of course! Rock-solid too. It was the dam that tamed the Kaveri. No more floods in the monsoon, and enough water for the fields in the summer."
Ajji put her head around the door. "Are you talking about KRS, Amma?"

"Aaaan, KRS," Muttajji said, looking fondly at Ajji. "Your Ajji was my fifth child, the youngest, but always the smartest. Do you know, twins, my children came like clockwork, one every two monsoons. The day your Ajji decided to come out, your Muttajja could not be found. Later, he told us that he had gone to see Gandhiji give a speech at the Gowalia Tank Maidan. He was so excited. 'Quit India!' he kept shouting the whole day, silly man, disturbing the baby.'





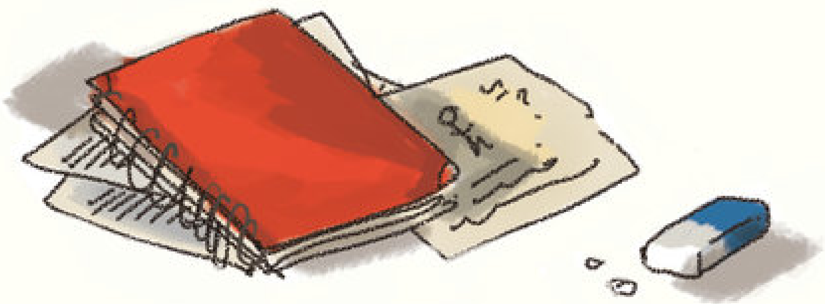
"Quit India!" Putti's eyes grew round with excitement. "We studied it in history, Putta! The movement started in 1942! That means 1942 was the year that... "

"...Ajji was born," pouted Putta. "Not Muttajji."

"That's a start!" said Putti. "Which year were you born, Ajji?"

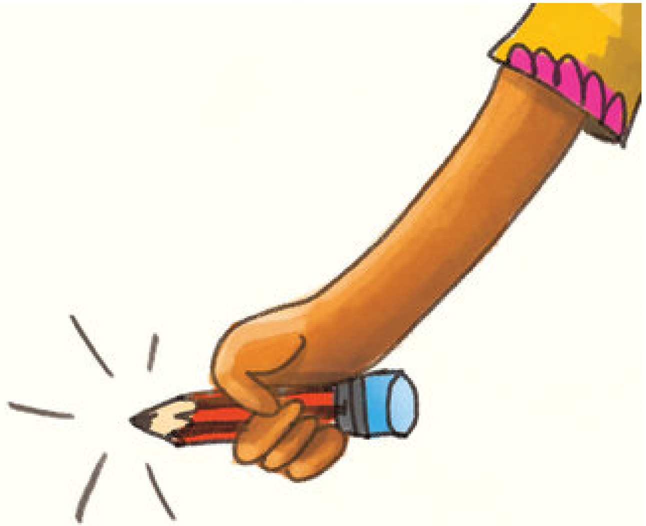
"I will be 74 this year," said Ajji. "So I was born in?"

Putti quickly did the calculations. "1942!*" she said. Ajji nodded.



(2016 - 74 = 1942)





"Now, Ajji is Muttajji's fifth child and all her kids were two years apart!" said Putta. "So if Ajji was born in 1942..."

"...Muttajji's fourth child was born in 1942 - 2 = 1940, the third in 1940 - 2 = 1938, the second in 1938 - 2 = 1936, and the first in 1936 - 2 = 1934."

"So Muttajji was married in 1932!" cried Putti.

"Not necessarily," said Putta. "Muttajji didn't say her first child was born two years after her marriage. She only said a dam was built in Mysore the year she got married."



"Maybe this will help, twins," said Ajji, bringing in bowls of vermicelli payasa, Muttajji's favourite sweet dish. "KRS is the Krishnarajasagar Dam. The Brindavan Gardens are the gardens attached to it. We went there last year to see the musical fountains, remember?"

The twins nodded. "Mmmm," said Putti. "Your payasa is the BEST, Ajji!"

"When was KRS built, do you know, Ajji?"

Ajji shook her head. "I'm not sure. But you can go with Ajja to the central library after lunch and find out there."



In the library, Putti found a book on the history of Mysore.
"Here it is!" she whispered. "*Two of Mysore's most visited tourist spots, the KRS Dam and the adjacent Brindavan Gardens, were opened to the public in 1932.*'"

The twins grinned - that meant Muttajji had indeed married in 1932, 84* years ago!

**(2016 - 1932 = 84)*



"Muttajji *thinks* she was 16 when she got married," said Putti, "but she could have been 15 or 17 or 18."

"She also said she was about 9 or 10 when her Bombay uncle told her about the 'clean' train," said Putta. "Ajja may know what that means."

Ajja was in the reading room.

"Ajja," whispered Putti, "in the olden days, did people get dirty travelling by train?"

Ajja nodded. "There were steam engines then, which ran on coal, not electricity," he said. "Black coal dust used to fly out of the chimney and land on everyone and everything. Terrible!"

"That's it, Putti!" hissed Putta."Electric trains were the 'clean' trains!"



He pulled out a book on the Indian Railways. "It says here," he pointed, "that India's first electric train came to Bombay in 1925!"

"And Muttajji says she was about 9 then," said Putta. "If she is right, then Muttajji was born in 1916*. "

"But she could be wrong, you know," frowned Putti.

"Only one way to make sure," said Putta. "We have to find out if that big party for kings and queens in Delhi, which Muttajji said happened five years before she was born, happened in 1911**."

They ran back to Ajja.

**(1925-9 = 1916); **(1916 -5 = 1911)*

"Ajja, was there a grand party for a foreign king who visited India around 1911?"
Ajja frowned. "1911? Why is that date so familiar? Aaan yes. It was the year the Gateway of India was built in Bombay. And yes, it was built to welcome the British Emperor of India, George V! There must have been several grand parties, not one."
Ajja tapped his forehead, looking very pleased with himself. "Not bad for an old brain, eh?"

"Not bad at all!" cried the twins. "Thanks, Ajja!" They knew exactly how old Muttajji was!



Five minutes later, the twins were racing homewards.

"Muttajji, " they panted, rushing straight to her room, "did the Mysore Maharaja get his gold medal from King George V?"

"Aaaaaan!" Muttajji said happily. "That's it! George! What clever children you are!"

"That means, Muttajji, that you were born in 1916! You are exactly 100* years old today!"

**(2016 - 1916 = 100)*





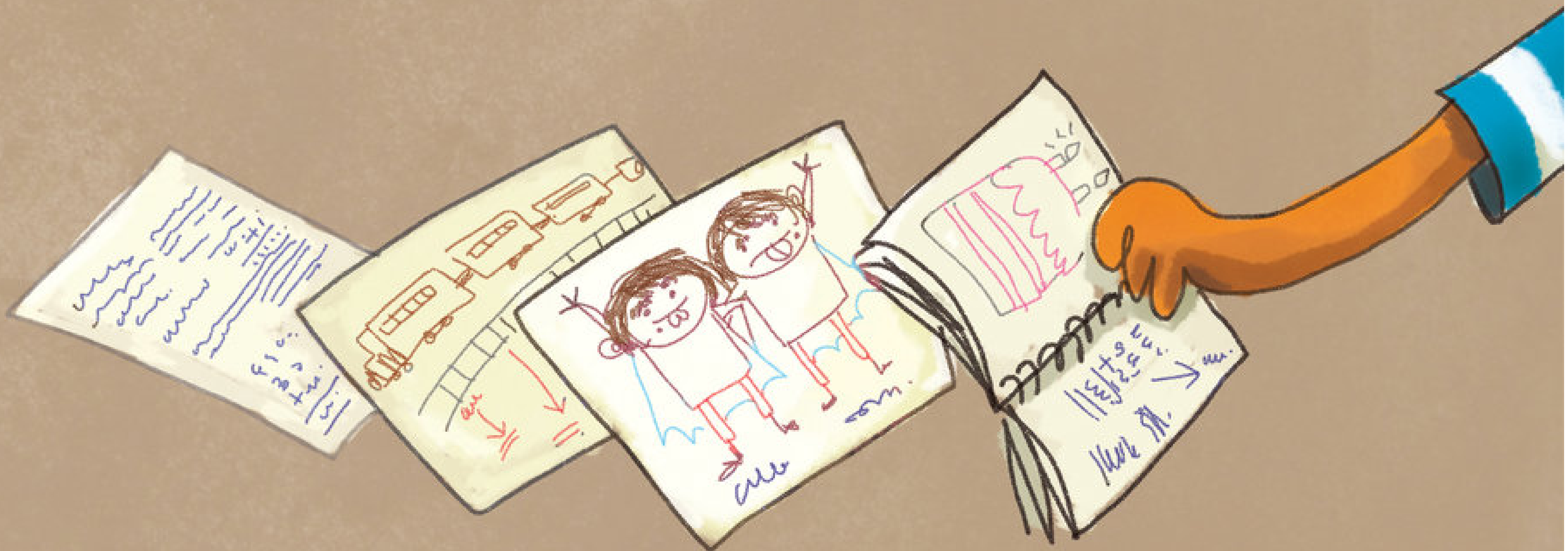
"That's great detective work, twins!" smiled Amma. "I think you - and Muttajji - deserve a special treat. A big, spongy one, with pink icing, and a rose on top."

"Hurrayyyyyy!" cheered the twins.



The Grand Maharaja-Maharani Party (and other fun stuff from Indian history)

Remember all the important historical events Muttajji talked about in the story? They all really happened! Here is a little more information about them.

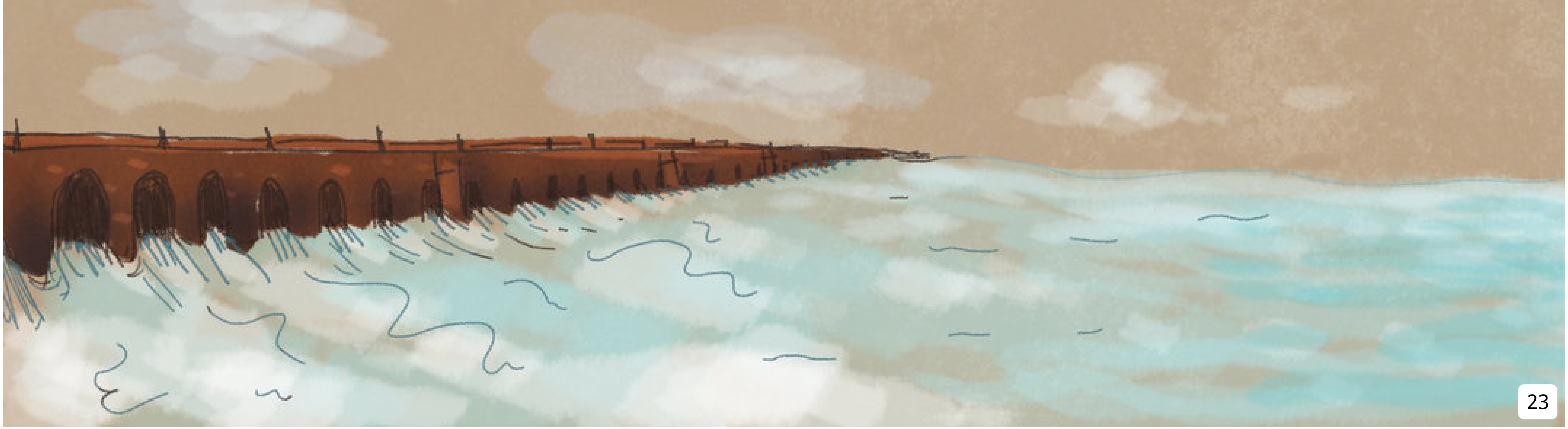


The Grand Maharaja-Maharani Party (1911) - When the British Emperor George V and his wife Queen Mary visited India for the first time, they hosted a grand party for over 400 Indian kings and queens. It was called the Delhi Durbar. To feed 200,000 guests, bakeries put out 20000 loaves of bread a day, and over 1000 cattle and sheep were slaughtered for every meal! Many Indian rulers received gold medals from the Emperor, including the Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV.



The Clean Trains (1925) - On Feb 3, 1925, India's first electric train left Bombay's Victoria Terminus for Kurla station. With that, India became the 3rd country in Asia and only the 24th in the world to introduce railway electrification.

The Dam That Tamed The Kaveri (1932) - The Kaveri river runs through southern Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The river was always a blessing, keeping Mysore fertile, but, like every other river, it used to flood in the monsoons and run dry in the summer. All that changed when a dam was built across the river and the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) reservoir created. The reservoir still provides most of the drinking water for Bangalore city.



Gandhiji's Big Speech (1942) - The 'Quit India Speech' was a speech made by Gandhiji on 8 August 1942, at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay. Gandhiji asked people to fight against British rule not by using violence, but by disobeying their laws. Five years later, on August 15, 1947, the non-violent war got the results Gandhiji wanted - the British left, and India became independent. Today, the Gowalia Tank Maidan is called the August Kranti Maidan in memory of that peaceful revolution.



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How Old is Muttajji?
(English)

Putta and Putti know that Muttajji is really, really old. But exactly HOW old is she? Join the twin detectives on an exciting mathematical journey through Muttajji's memories and India's history in their quest to crack the big question.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.